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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002994

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY ZOELLICK'S JULY 12, 2005 MEETING
WITH IRAQI PRESIDENT JALAL TALABANI

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2897

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2872

[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 2863

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires David M. Satterfield for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: In a July 12 lunch meeting, President Jalal Talabani was optimistic that the Sunni Arabs in the constitution drafting committee will reach consensus with other committee members. He predicted the next elections will use provincial electoral districts rather than a single national electoral district system. Talabani noted his interest in restoring pensions to retired military and "cleaning up" the Presidency Council. Citing Syria and Iran as the biggest security concerns, he pressed the need for a U.S.-Iraqi security strategy. Talabani believes Arabs who arrived in Kirkuk under Saddam's arabization campaign should be allowed to remain in Kirkuk but not vote on its future status. The Deputy Secretary conveyed the President's appreciation for Talabani's efforts to bring Sunni Arabs aboard the constitutional drafting process and indicated a visit to Washington by Talabani will be welcome after the constitution is completed. End Summary

[1](#)2. (U) PARTICIPANTS:

U.S.

Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick
Charge d' Affaires David Satterfield
D Executive Assistant Ambassador Ross Wilson
S/I Deputy Director Robert Deutsch
Adam Ereli, PA
NSC Senior Director Meghan O'Sullivan
Political Minister Counselor Robert Ford
Poloff (notetaker)

IRAQ

President Jalal Talabani
Chief of Staff Kamaron Karadaghi

Sunnis to Reach Consensus on Constitution

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Sharing his amusement over the internal squabbling of the 15 Sunni Arabs who joined the constitution drafting committee, President Talabani assured the Deputy Secretary that the Sunnis will reach consensus and compromise with other committee members. Talabani countered some Sunnis assertions that the 15 additional Sunnis in the committee do not represent Sunni Arab diversity. "There are representatives from the Sunni Endowment, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and Sunni tribes," he argued.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) The Deputy Secretary conveyed the President's appreciation for Talabani's efforts to bring Sunni Arabs aboard the constitutional drafting process and said the President looks forward to Talabani's visiting Washington after the Constitution is completed. He remarked that in his meeting with Sunni committee members Adanan al-Janabi and Mujbil Shaykh Issa (the latter from Kirkuk), they listed federalism, Kirkuk, Iraq's definition as an Arab nation, and dual nationality as the remaining sticking points in the drafting process.

Provincial Districts for Next Elections?

[1](#)5. (C/NF) Responding to the delegation's query over the most likely electoral system for the December elections, Talabani said he supported the increasingly popular proposal to have provincial electoral districts rather than the single national district system that was used in January. Though Kurds might lose a few votes in the south, they would still be well represented in the northern and central areas of the country, he predicted. Sunni Arabs, most Shia, even Ayatollah Sistani, appear to support the idea of provincial lists, except Moqtada al-Sadr's group, he said.

Cleaning up the Presidency Council

16. (C/NF) Talabani prided himself in his initiative to clean up and organize the Presidency Council. Talabani arrived at the Presidency to find no records of expenditures. "Members of the Council received USD 2 million per month each, but we have no idea how they spent it," observed Talabani. He said Deputy VP Abd Abdul al-Mehdi has prepared operating norms, but Deputy VP Gazi al-Yawr disagrees with some of the points. Talabani had given his deputies an ultimatum to reach consensus by July 13.

Addressing Military Pensions

17. (C/NF) To Talabani, restoring pensions to the thousands of retired Iraqi military veterans poses an immediate challenge. Given that many of the retirees are Sunni Arabs, the fact that most have not received pensions in over two years is a sore issue for the Sunni community, explained Talabani. The 300,000 military retirees (of them, some 6,000 Saddam-era generals and field marshals) at least deserve to receive what they contributed to the system, Talabani reasoned. (Note: Talabani estimates the combined number of active and retired government employees at three million people.)

Aggressive Syria A Threat, Subtle Iranians Another

18. (C/NF) Commenting that Syria and Iran pose the most serious neighborhood threats to Iraq's security, Talabani said that of the two countries, the Iranians take a more subtle approach. Syria was allowing some 70 insurgents per day to cross into Iraqi territory, estimated Talabani. The Syrian government's recent arrest of some 1,400 insurgents is a good start, but not enough. "Hundreds of thousands had come over," claimed Talabani.

19. (C/NF) Though Iranian involvement in Iraq is harder to detect than Syria's, continued Talabani, the Iraqi government has evidence of ties between the Iranian government and the terrorist groups Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna. These groups are stirring up trouble in Sunni Arab and Kurdish areas of Iraq. The Iranians have instructed them to refrain from activities in Iraqi Shia areas to make Iraqis believe that the Sunni and Kurdish areas are restive while the Shia populations are peaceful, asserted Talabani.

110. (C/NF) Talabani observed that former President Khatami had been reasonable and easy to work with. Khatami allowed Kurds on both sides of the border to visit one another and had encouraged their culture. Khatami also allowed Shia Kurds to participate in his government, including his oil minister. Talabani is uncertain how relations will evolve with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, observing that Ahmadinejad once headed Iran's Iranian-Kurdish Affairs Office, which organized "operations" against Iranian Kurds. He said Ahmadinejad was very close to Ayatollah Khamani.

Insurgency a Problem, but Less So, Says Talabani

111. (C/NF) To the Deputy Secretary's query over the current level of insurgency and its strength relative to the past, Talabani listed the two categories of insurgency confronting Iraq: Al Qaeda, al-Zarkawi, Ansar Islam and Wahabbi outsiders on the one hand and disgruntled Iraqi Sunni Arabs on the other. Talabani explained that the strength of the insurgents has diminished for three reasons: Iraqi security forces are now better able to fight them; people are tired of the violence, and many of their key leaders have been killed or captured. After the January elections, many Iraqi Sunnis realized violence was a "dead end" and are coming around to political participation. As people grew disenchanted with the insurgency, they began collaborating with the security forces. Partisans are like fish and the people are the water. If the water dries up, the fish die, he mused.

We Need Your Help on Security

112. (C/NF) Reiterating his interest in establishing a joint U.S.- Iraqi security strategy, Talabani underscored the need for U.S. help to secure the Baghdad-Najaf, Baghdad-Baquba, and Baghdad-Kirkuk roadways; protect the Kirkuk pipeline; and deal with insurgency problems in Tal Afar and Mosul. He also sought our support to remove the Baquba police chief, who Talabani alleges is too close to the insurgents.

Give Kirkuk Some Time, Suggests Talabani

113. (C/NF) On Kirkuk, Talabani said he expects to reach agreement with the Turkmen and the Shia Arabs on Kirkuk. The Front of Turkmen of Kirkuk and the Shia Arabs, including a Sistani representative, support his initiative. Talabani said Kirkuk's longstanding Arab population should be allowed to remain in Kirkuk and vote on Kirkuk's future status, while Arabs who arrived through Saddam's Arabization of Kirkuk could also remain in Kikurk, but not vote on its future. The "Saddam" Arabs could register and vote in their places of origin and remain in Kirkuk, Talabani explained. Alleging that Barzani is less flexible on Kirkuk, Talabani promised to try to convince him to support this "national solution." The decision on Kirkuk should not occur immediately, however; only after one to three years, to allow time for Kirkuk to normalize, for its residents to reconcile, he suggested.

114. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.
Satterfield